



November 22, 2023

Dear Friend:

When this Arts Center was in its infancy — before its stages were built, even before anyone had put a shovel in the ground — there was already an Arts Education department at NJPAC.

We sent artists into public school classrooms, staged family performances and offered teachers resources for bringing the arts into their classrooms, all years before we sold a single ticket.

That we did so was one of the gifts given to this organization by one man: Philip Thomas, the Arts Center's founding Vice President of Arts Education. After stints working with the National Endowment for the Arts and the New Jersey State Council on the Arts, Philip joined NJPAC in 1992 — a full five years before our doors opened.

Like everyone who had a hand in shaping the Arts Center into what it is today, Philip had big ambitions for this place. Before our opening

night, he'd created programs that put National Dance Institute classes into schools in Essex and Union counties, arranged a series of workshops at community organizations where members of the renown a cappella group Sweet Honey in the Rock sang with children, and launched the *Arts Basic to the Curriculum Conference* — an arts integration conference for teachers, held on multiple Newark college campuses.

He hit the ground running, and never let up.

"Our goal from the outset was to build partnerships with schools, with school districts, with community based organizations all across the state," he told me when he came back to Newark recently for a visit. And that determination has shaped our arts education efforts ever since.

So many of the programs that NJPAC still proudly presents today, from our *SchoolTime* performances for school children to our annual *Kwanzaa Family Festival*, were first implemented by Philip.

But in November, when our campus is filled with the sounds of jazz all month long during the [TD James Moody Jazz Festival](#), it's hard not to think that the crown jewel of Philip's years of work here was his foresight in establishing what is to this day our signature Arts Education program: [TD Jazz for Teens](#). This year-long Saturday arts training program offers young jazz vocalists and instrumentalists, ages 12 to 18, an unequaled opportunity to hone their skills — and to



play with a cohort of talented peers. (By the way, if you know a talented teen: Registration for the spring semester is now open; audition tapes are due by Dec. 9. Learn more [here](#).)

Philip came back to our campus this past spring, when *TD Jazz for Teens* held its 25th annual spring concert for its graduating students — always a wonderful celebration, but this year also a reunion of sorts for those who established the program, including Philip, our inaugural program director, the great bassist Rufus Reid, and saxophonist Don Braden, who directed the program in later years.

Philip recruited Rufus to design this program during NJPAC's first season — and persuading a performer of his caliber to create our curriculum instantly set the program apart.

"I was adamant that if we did it, we had to do it a certain way," said Rufus, who has now retired from teaching, but still tours and records. That included making sure that everyone on the faculty was a working professional artist.

"All the teachers can play. They are in the trenches, making music by touring and gigging. To me, that's why the program has been successful," he said.

In addition to multiple-GRAMMY®-winning alto sax player and jazz composer Mark Gross, *TD Jazz for Teens'* current Director of Jazz Instruction, the program's faculty today includes a roster of more than a dozen working jazz musicians including GRAMMY®-nominated artists saxophonist Wayne Escoffery and guitarist Alex Wintz (himself

an alum of the program) as well as celebrated percussionist Alvester Garnett and acclaimed, Russian-born trumpeter Valery Ponomarev, a member of The Jazz Messengers. Even more bold-faced names, including eight-time GRAMMY®-winning bassist Christian McBride,

the Arts Center's Jazz Advisor, vibraphonist Stefon Harris, and MacArthur "Genius" fellow and Doris Duke Artist Award winner Regina Carter offer master classes, working directly with students.

Teens studying percussion, guitar, bass, trumpet, trombone, saxophone, piano and other instruments, as well as jazz vocal performance, are invited into the program via audition. Throughout the school year, they fill the Center for Arts Education on the NJPAC campus every Saturday, turning its hallways into a festival of sound, with beats and melodies spilling out of every doorway. Although the program is not free, scholarship assistance keeps it accessible to talented students regardless of their financial circumstances. Any interested student is welcome, regardless of means.

Critically, our students also perform publicly together, both at semester-ending concerts and at events throughout the year, both on and off NJPAC's campus. All students record their own compositions together in a studio setting, an annual highlight of the program.

Music has taken the program's alumni far: Percussionist and composer Tyshawn Sorey, a MacArthur "Genius" grant winner, was among the program's first students. Guitarist Alex Wintz, now a *TD Jazz for Teens* teaching artist, got his first GRAMMY® nomination for his work with the Terraza Big Band. Vocalist Lucy Yeghiazaryan performs around the country.



"There are a bunch of students I have taught here who've gotten scholarships to go on to Berklee or NYU or the Manhattan School of Music, major conservatories. I started teaching here 10 years ago now and I'm seeing quite a few of my earlier students out in the New York City jazz scene working professionally," noted Wintz.

"But I think there are some of my students who just want music to be part of their life forever, even if not professionally. They understand that music can bring a lot of light into your life."

Gross echoed that thought. "Whether they go to a higher-ed program or not, whether they play professionally or not, we want to give them a love of music, and through that, a sense of what life is about," he said.

We can't thank Philip enough for bringing that light, that love, to so many of our students for so many years.

All good wishes,

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read "John Schreiber", with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

John Schreiber



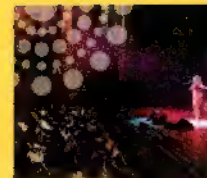
### **native american heritage**

In honor of Native American Heritage Month, NJPAC's November 27 [Standing in Solidarity](#) conversation is about "Identity and Misconceptions of Native Americans in our Culture." We'll be dissecting harmful misrepresentations and sharing best practices for



### **wrapped up with a bow**

Tickets to a performance at NJPAC make the best gifts: They don't clutter up your den! They never break! And no batteries are required! Plus, you can buy them right from your home, without circling that mall parking lot looking for a spot. How's that for holiday happiness? We have a variety of fun family entertainment coming up including the spectacular



### **want perks?**

NJPAC brings top-tier artists, comedians and musicians to our stages all year long. By joining our Member community — with a gift as low as \$100 — you'll make the most out of every trip to the Arts Center, with exclusive access to